

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 799

By Herron

A RESOLUTION to declare an urgent need to thoroughly study all relevant issues pertaining to the extent and nature of mental health needs of Tennessee's children and youth.

WHEREAS, sound mental health and emotional well-being is vital to all of Tennessee's 1.4 million children and youth in order for them to attain their potential as citizens of this great State; and

WHEREAS, there is great disparity across Tennessee in the availability and accessibility of caring, competent, and able child and adolescent psychiatrists, psychologists, and clinical counselors to provide care for children who have mental and behavioral health care needs, and this disparity especially exists in rural and remote counties and communities; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that almost 68,000 children in Tennessee meet the criteria to be diagnosed as having a serious emotional disturbance, and approximately 45,500 of those children are enrolled in TennCare; and

WHEREAS, within the State of Tennessee, suicide is the third leading cause of death for youths fifteen to twenty-four years of age, and within one-third of Tennessee's counties the suicide rate for this age cohort exceeds the national rate; and

WHEREAS, alcohol and substance use among Tennessee's children and youth is serious and significant, with results from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey revealing the following regarding Tennessee public high school students in 2005: seventy-five percent reported taking at least one drink of alcohol in their life; twenty-four percent reported taking their first drink of alcohol other than a few sips before the age of thirteen; forty-two percent reported having at least one drink, and twenty-five percent reported having five or more drinks, within a couple of hours within the past thirty days; and eleven percent reported driving a vehicle when they had been drinking alcohol within the past thirty days; and

WHEREAS, a fall 2003 study of youth in juvenile justice facilities in Tennessee documented at least fifty-three percent had mental health problems, forty-two percent had substance abuse problems, and thirty percent had co-occurring mental illness and substance use; and

WHEREAS, the 2004 Tennessee Commission of Children and Youth Children's Program Outcome Review Team review of children in the custody of the Department of Children's Services indicated fifty percent of all children in custody, sixty-nine percent of adolescents, and eighty-four percent of children adjudicated delinquent had a mental health diagnosis; the report further indicated forty-eight percent of adolescents, including seventy-two percent of children adjudicated delinquent, had substance abuse issues; and

WHEREAS, in 2004-2005, 175,692 Tennessee students were receiving special education services, of which 5,079 were seriously emotionally disturbed; and

WHEREAS, children and youth are not immune from debilitating trauma and psychological difficulties subsequent to the extraordinary tragic events such as occurred in our country on September 11, 2001, or the acts of violence at schools such as occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, at Campbell County Comprehensive High School in Jacksboro, Tennessee, at West Paducah High School in Paducah, Kentucky, and at a school bus stop in Cumberland City, Tennessee, or from their own personal experiences of abuse, neglect, or bullying, or even from the war-related death and mayhem seen on televisions in homes each day and night all across this country; and

WHEREAS, all children are at risk of threat of harm to their emotional stability and well-being because of tragic yet natural or accidental life occurrences, such as death of parents, siblings, extended family members, and friends, and may experience bouts of clinical depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and behavioral problems; such children do, indeed, need professional mental health services to recover from such times, and without timely, high-quality professional help may never recover; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee lacks a public children's mental health service delivery system that is sufficiently coordinated, comprehensive, and effective in identifying, assessing, diagnosing, treating, managing, and supporting children who have mental health care needs

and their families, and thus, the delivery system for services to meet their needs is greatly fragmented, too often inaccessible, and largely inadequate; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that this General Assembly declares an urgent need to thoroughly study all relevant issues pertaining to the extent and nature of mental health needs of Tennessee's children and youth and how those needs can be thoroughly, competently, compassionately, and effectively addressed and met.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Select Committee on Children and Youth shall study the children's mental health system in Tennessee and develop recommendations for its improvement, and the Select Committee is authorized to establish a study committee of appropriate persons from whom it may obtain consultation and receive advisement in this effort.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, as appropriate and upon request, representatives of the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury, of the Departments of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Children's Services, Education, Health, Human Services, of the Governor's Office of Children's Care Coordination, of the Commission of Children and Youth, along with individuals who have personal experience or expert knowledge pertaining to mental health care and service delivery to children, shall provide assistance in the study process.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an interim report describing the mental health needs of Tennessee's children and youth, along with an initial blueprint for a comprehensive, coordinated, family-centered, and culturally responsive system for the mental and the behavioral health care of Tennessee's children and youth, be delivered to the legislature on or before April 1, 2007.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a final report setting forth the master plan for development, implementation, and on-going oversight of such comprehensive, coordinated, family-centered, and culturally responsive system for mental and behavioral health care of the State's children and youth be delivered to the legislature on or before April 1, 2008.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.

